

How leaders are handling the pandemic

A comprehensive study on how business leaders feel at the moment and their 50 top tips to help you



UK Leaders are Determined to Win

I hope that you, your family and friends are safe and well and that you are coping through this period.

A couple of weeks ago we published our [six top tips for leading during the pandemic](#) which we hope has helped you to think about the way in which you communicate with your team, go about decision making and prepare for the changes that the coming weeks and months will throw at us.

After feedback on the article, we put together a leadership survey to bring together all the thoughts, tips and advice from business leaders across the UK and Ireland. Part of the reason for doing so is because we are all in this together. As a leader, we want you to know that you are not facing these challenges alone.

The survey has received a great response, with more than 75 business leaders from across the UK and Ireland sharing their advice, thoughts and challenges with us.

In this paper we explore the results of the survey to share how business leaders are feeling during the pandemic and what the future might look like.

We hope that you can gain some useful insights and ideas from the data, please know that we are here to help you in any way we can.

Best wishes,

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Executive Summary

Six things this survey is telling us:

1. The results are really positive as **78%** of leaders believe that their business is going to emerge with their full team and **45%** even believe that their business will be much stronger following the pandemic. This demonstrates that leaders have been using the time to work “on” rather than “in” their business.
2. **64%** of businesses have less work on than they did prior to the pandemic, **42%** of those have **76-100%** less work, which demonstrates the impact of the pandemic.
3. It is clear from analysing the data that attempting to handle the unknown situation we find ourselves in and the lack of clarity around the future has caused many challenges. Leaders have found it particularly challenging to have to learn the new rules about government initiatives such as the furlough scheme, with **30%** saying this has been their biggest challenge. **20%** told us that their next biggest challenge has been trying to motivate a team that is working from home.
4. **49%** of leaders said that their biggest support over this period has come from their team, highlighting the need to keep everyone engaged, whether they are furloughed, working from home or still travelling into work. **29%** felt that networking groups or other businesses had provided them with the most support.
5. Communication and adaptability are two of the key skills that leaders told us they felt have been most important in dealing with the challenges that the pandemic has caused.

What leaders have told us about how they would emerge from the pandemic.

The first question we asked business leaders was how they felt about the future of their business. Their responses are:

We will emerge as a much stronger business



We will definitely “get through” and survive, with the whole team intact



We will survive but with a smaller team than we had



I am unsure if we shall get through

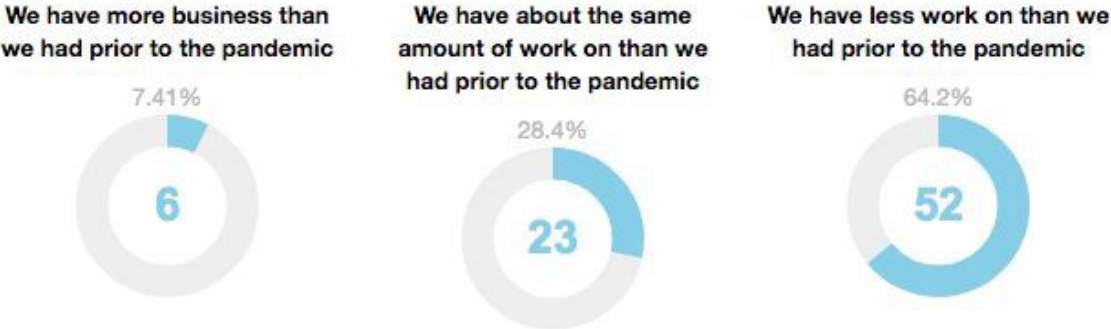


I feel the future looks bleak and I am struggling see a way through

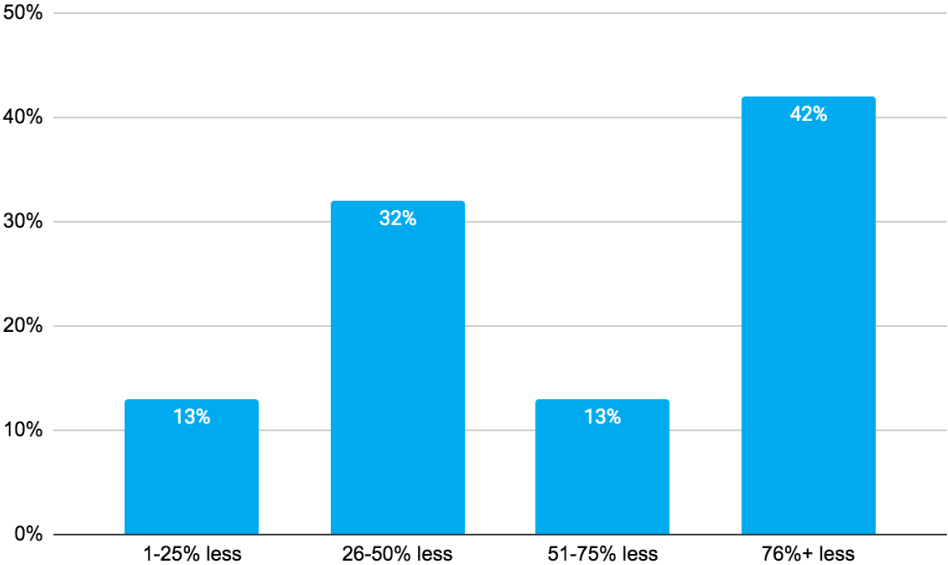


We asked leaders how busy they are during the pandemic.

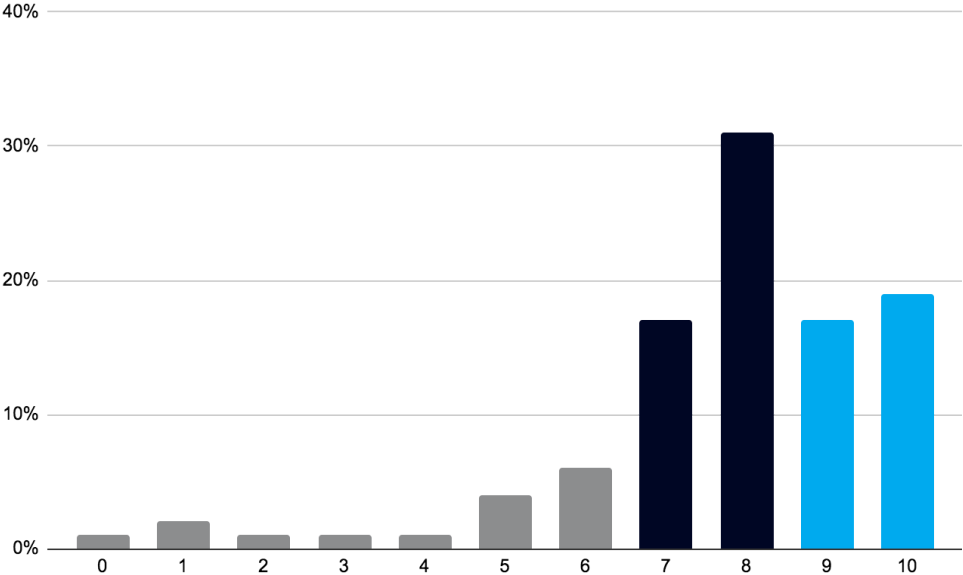
When we asked how busy their businesses have been during the pandemic, again the results were surprisingly positive with 28% having the same amount of business as prior to the pandemic and 7% even seeing an increase in business:



The following graph highlights for those that have less work, the impact this has had, on their business.



With less business than usual, you may well think that the general feeling would be negative, but when asked to rate how positive they felt about the future of the business on a scale of 0 -10 (0 being very pessimistic and 10 being extremely positive) the results came out very positive.



The key question is what needs to be done to move more scores further up the scale?

We strongly believe that Customer Experience (CX) is going to be one of the key strategies needed to emerge from the pandemic with really positive results. Spending the time now to gather data, review your processes and ensuring you have a comprehensive feedback strategy in the future will further secure your success and is the key to coming back strongly.

Leaders told us which core skills they would have liked, which would help them now, during this pandemic.

We asked the leaders, looking back, what skills would they have liked to have had to better prepare themselves for the pandemic.

The Top Ten

1. Communication With both your team and with customers
2. Adaptability Mapped more of the core processes to ensure flexibility
3. Video conference Learned new technology to prepare for meetings
4. Budgeting Planned a cost strategy to prepare for the downturn
5. Time management Really understood how to structure my day
6. Managing teams Understanding the impact of/and techniques for remote management
7. Social media Great way to keep customers up to date
8. Mental strength The need to look after yourself to stay in a positive place
9. Content writing To keep the website updated and continue with marketing
10. Prioritisation Only doing the tasks that are going to make the biggest difference

These are the biggest challenges that leaders are facing.

We asked the leaders what their biggest challenge has been during the pandemic and gave them some options to choose from. The top three were:

1. 30% of leaders said that it has been trying to understand the new rules about new **government funding** options e.g. furlough, tax breaks and grants
2. 20% said that managing and motivating a team remotely has been their biggest challenge
3. 28% selected our option for 'other' with these challenges coming up the most:
 - Pivoting the business to be remote rather than face to face
 - Cash flow
 - Gaining new business remotely

We asked how they felt they have performed as leaders.

We asked the leaders to reflect on their own performance during the pandemic to gain an understanding on how leaders are coping:

“Adequately. I could have done more to protect my own mental health.”

“I feel I have adjusted and tightened the sails, and have put the company on course to make it through this difficult period.”

“On the outside I have been calm and reassuring but I have felt emotionally affected due to me feeling responsible for the safekeeping of my staff.”

“I have been confident but I could have focused more on communication with clients.”

“I have had to pick up a lot of skills again that I had previously outsourced to staff... I am quite happy with that, however I feel like I have a lack of control over staff.”

“Hopefully I'm leading from the front, admitting that new ways of working are different, revising my skills and embracing new technology.”

“I acted quickly and firmly but now feel inadequate which is born of frustration at the whole situation.”

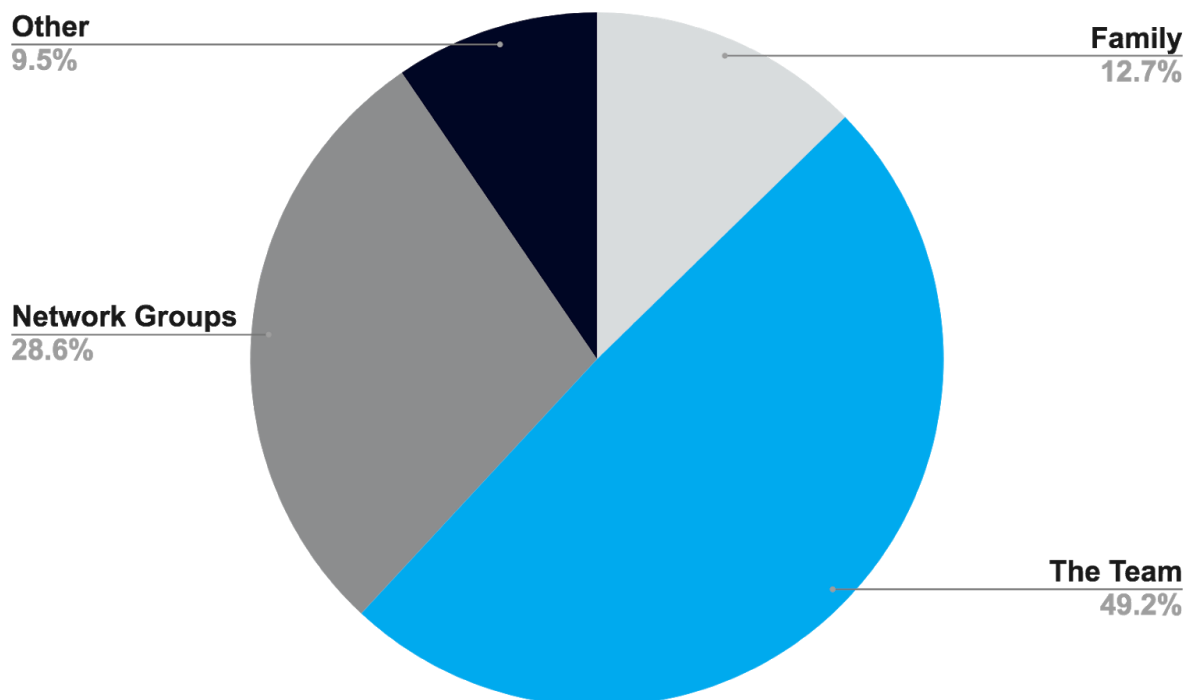
“I feel I have a strong sense of direction and understanding of what needs to be achieved in order for the business to survive and be in better shape.”

These are the biggest lessons learned from leading through the pandemic.

We asked the leaders what is the biggest lesson they have learned during this period. The six most recurring responses were:

1. Keep calm and be positive
2. Communicate, communicate, communicate
3. "It is OK not to be OK"
4. Look after yourself - "put your own oxygen mask on first"
5. Make time to develop and find new opportunities
6. This is a great time to restructure and look in the mirror

We also asked the leaders where they had received the most support. Nearly half said it came from their team with 29% saying it came from Networking Groups or other local businesses, and 13% have received the most support from their family:



The top 50 tips as selected by the business leaders.

Finally, we asked the business leaders to name the single best piece of advice that they could share for leading during the pandemic. Here are the top 50:

1. At times like this, it's good to remember there have always been times like this...
2. Be strong and take it day by day.
3. Carry on.
4. Cash is king!
5. Create an end of day routine to get out of work mode in the evening.
6. Define and agree your strategic direction for getting through the pandemic.
7. Don't fear tough choices.
8. Don't quit.
9. Don't read the newspapers.
10. Don't stress, we are all in the same boat.
11. Don't spend too much time listening to others opinions.
12. Ensure your communication is wrapped with empathy and emotional intelligence.
13. Focus on what you can do.
14. Get your income from several sources.
15. Go back to your vision, purpose and culture for inspiration on the next steps.
16. Hang in there, you are not alone.
17. I was told to complete a 6 month cash flow forecast and it was the best advice I could get. As a business owner, I need to be more organised with knowing where and when money is coming in and going out than ever before.
18. I believe there has never been a better time to re-negotiate with trade suppliers.
19. It's acceptable for your productivity to slow down.
20. Keep developing and learning.
21. Keep everyone updated, even staff on furlough so when they do come back they are still up to speed and feel motivated.
22. Keep hold of all of the cash you can.
23. Keep in touch.
24. Keep marketing your business through social media.
25. Keep motivated and don't stress out.

26. Keep seeking financial support and look for new operating strategies for when you eventually open.
27. Keep smiling, the storm will pass and industries will come back bigger and stronger as a whole when this is all over.
28. Keep things as tight as possible and we'll get through.
29. Look after existing clients and build a pipeline for when the crisis is over.
30. Look after number one.
31. Make the tough decisions quickly!
32. Not to plan too many scenarios out as things can change quickly.
33. Nothing is forever.
34. One door closes and another one opens.
35. Plan.
36. Relax, do not overreact and take one day at a time.
37. Start getting healthy
38. Stay positive, get prepared to unlock and create a positive future.
39. Stay visible
40. Switch off the TV. Just read the headlines. Get on with it. Repurpose if you have to.
41. Target one ideal client avatar with your marketing.
42. Team support in developing new methods of working.
43. Trust your instinct.
44. Try to make the best of the situation.
45. Use this as an opportunity.
46. Value your team and keep them motivated.
47. Various webinars are available on practical business support.
48. We are all in it together.
49. Working from home sometimes doesn't suit all, adapt and allow time for yourself.
50. You can't be creative and problem solve when you are in fight or flight mode. You need to relax into this to come up with the best creative solutions.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that 64% of businesses have less work than they do prior to the pandemic, the survey results show that leaders are keeping positive about the future with 45% believing their business will emerge much stronger following the pandemic.

The key conclusions that we have drawn from the survey are:

1. Keeping your customers engaged is crucial. Now is the time to be identifying how you can help your customers to ensure your relationship with them remains healthy. Keeping in touch with your customer base may require patience and will certainly call on all of your emotional intelligence to get the timing and tone of the communication, right.
2. The results show that 20% of businesses feel they will survive but with a smaller team. Thinking through the process for reducing your numbers is daunting and can be a challenging task. Discussing this through with someone from outside the business, can be an invaluable thing to do, to help remove the emotional connection with the decision.
3. This period of less business is a once in a lifetime opportunity to work on your customer journey and to develop the magic touchpoints that will delight your customers in the future. 53% of the leaders that believe their business will emerge much stronger following the pandemic currently have less work on than normal, demonstrating that they are using this time to work “on” their business rather than “in” it.
4. Many of your customers will also be quiet at present, so now is the time to start a conversation with them to find out what they really require, need and want from you and your business in the future. Conducting a simple survey with your customers could be a game changer.
5. One of the biggest challenges that leaders are facing is keeping a team that is working from home motivated. Communication is key to this but again your tone and timing needs to be right emotionally. You could benefit from talking to someone outside of your business to get a fresh perspective on your communication plans.
6. This survey has drawn out optimism and a leader’s “fighting spirit” of getting through. If you would like to discuss your challenges and opportunities please do contact us. We are learning a huge amount each day, as we talk to our clients and as a result we can often shortcut thinking with creative CX solutions, which provide excellent outcomes.

About **insight**⁶

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE SPECIALISTS

6 great reasons to choose insight⁶ to partner your brand to improve CX (customer experience).



customer experience reviews

CX reviews involve a researcher experiencing the service your team delivers first hand, and then reporting back the findings. The criteria for the cxreview is always tailored to your business



customer journey mapping

"You can't manage what you don't measure" and mapping your customer's journey throughout your entire business is the crucial step in the cxfactor. Once the mapping workshops are complete you will have a roadmap to improve CX



focus and listening groups

Establish how your customer feels about your business through the use of listening and focus groups. Our CX directors facilitate a group of customers through a pre-planned, thorough process offering the feedback you need to improve the CX



CX training and development

We use the output from the CX reviews, coupled with our sector experience, to ensure we deliver inspiring and motivational training and development workshops for your team



customer online feedback

Our online survey tools enable you to identify at any time how your existing customers and team members are feeling. Our feedbackdirect system allows you to measure your customer's experience during their journey at regular intervals



mentoring and coaching

Changing your team's behaviour is crucial to the success of improving your cxfactor. Through our coaching and mentoring we work closely with key team members to help them develop their skills and behaviour to embrace the challenge of improving the CX



Our dedicated team of customer experience directors have a wealth of business experience, as well as an understanding of CX which is second to none. When you merge these unique talents, you gain a local CX partner who helps you transform the CX within your business.

By facilitating our icx6 model they will take your business on a motivational journey, which has structure, accountability and a commitment to transform your customer's experience.

Our CX directors' experience of working with large teams will ensure that your CX strategy will align with your vision for the business.